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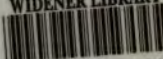
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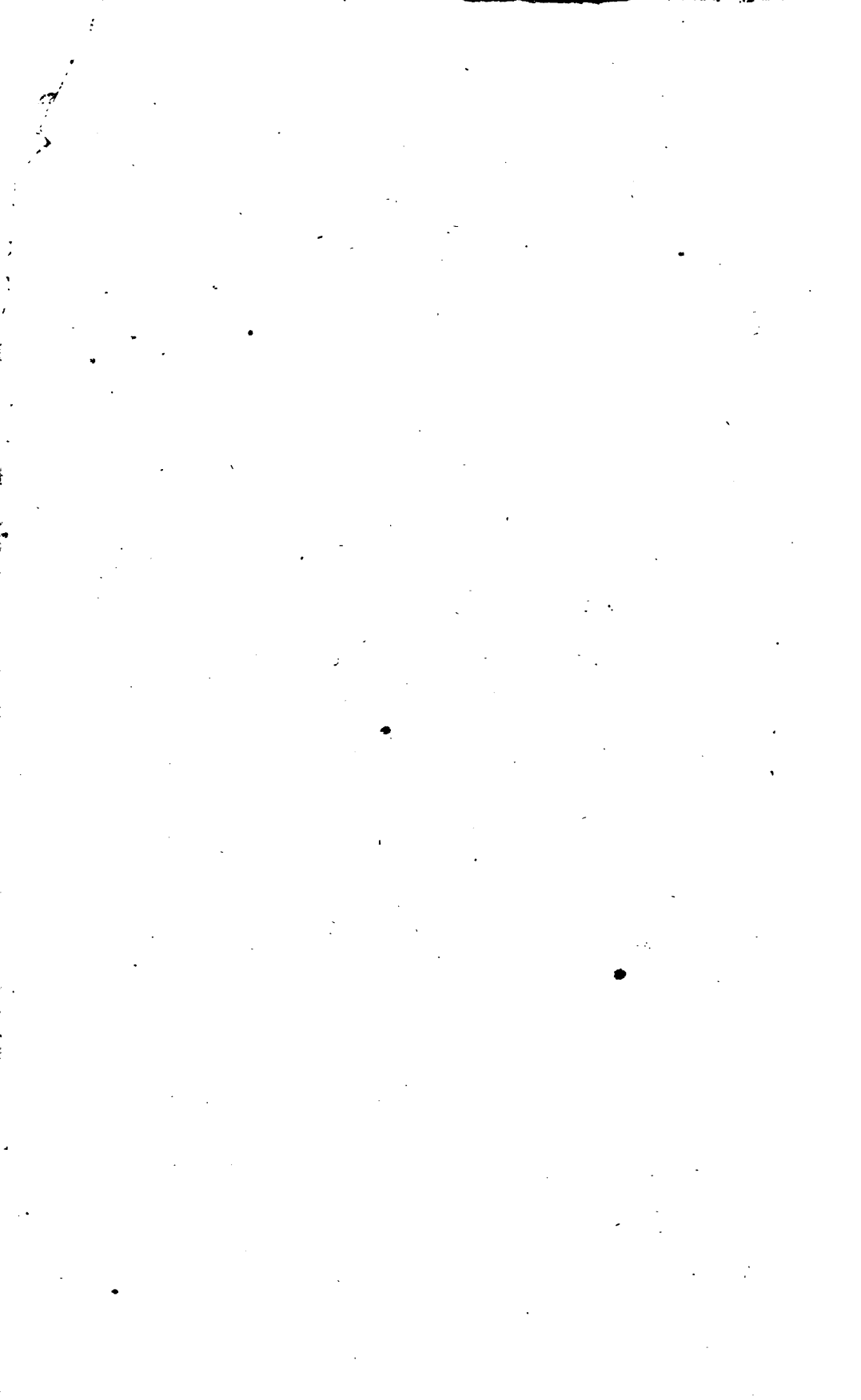


*Vermilye*

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MR. VERMILYE'S  
FAREWELL SERMON.

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A

# FAREWELL DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED TO THE

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

OF THE

FIRST PARISH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD,

MAY 3, 1835,

ON RESIGNING HIS PASTORAL CHARGE,

By THOMAS E. VERMILYE, A. M.



**Springfield:**

PRINTED BY G. AND C. ~~ERRIAM~~.

1835.



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Life of David A. Wells  
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## SERMON.

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"AND now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." ACTS, XX. 32.

THE APOSTLE PAUL, the "chosen vessel to bear Christ's name unto the Gentiles, and to suffer for his sake," was richly and peculiarly qualified by natural endowments and gracious affections, for the successful discharge of his ministry. Whether we contemplate the strength and enlargement of his mind, his fortitude, his intrepidity, his fidelity, or the tenderness, meekness and gentleness, he displayed, we discover a spirit of no ordinary cast, and are brought into fellowship with a heart alive with no common sensibilities. Qualities the most essential for his varied and arduous work, but such as are rarely combined in the same individual, in him harmoniously blended: fitting him to become the able advocate, and, if need be, the willing martyr, of the truth, and forming him into an example of the humble and affectionate temper of the Gospel.

His *courage and fidelity* were manifest in the many scenes of persecution and danger through which he passed; in which he never shrunk from duty, or withheld one syllable of the truth from motives of personal safety or advancement. It was his evident determination, at all hazards, to hold forth the pure word of life: "testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."

The *warmth of his affections*,—how deeply and

tenderly he could feel, how ardently he could love, is observed in every page of his epistles.—With what sorrow was he affected at the adversity, what joy did he experience in the prosperity, of his beloved brethren. Their persons, their concerns, interest him as they are interested in Christ Jesus ; and to promote their temporal, but especially their spiritual, welfare, is his ceaseless desire. With strong asseveration he at one time declares, “God is my witness, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ :” at another, “Now we *live*, if ye stand fast in the Lord :” and again, “Ye are in our hearts, to live and die with you.” There is an emphasis in such language which not only portrays his own heart, but which reminds us how strong are the bonds that unite kindred souls in Jesus Christ : how much more refined and elevated a friendship the Gospel produces, where a common faith exists, common spiritual hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are experienced, and the same heavenly rest is sought, than any earthly attachments whatever. The one has an origin and an aim pure and holy ; the other is based on the earth, and partakes of an earthly character : the one begins, and must cease, in time ; the other but commences here, to outlive time, to grow and be perpetuated through eternity.

A most beautiful specimen of Paul’s faithfulness to the souls of men, and of his affectionate sympathy with his brethren, is given in his address to the elders of Ephesus. On his way, bound in spirit, to Jerusalem, not knowing the things which should befall him there, conscious that he was about to place himself in the power of enemies from whom he could expect no clemency, and apprehending that the separation might prove final for this world, he convoked them at Miletus, to give them his last, it might be his dying, admonitions and instructions. And with what intense feeling does his address abound ? He adverts to his past labors ; “Ye know that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one, night and day with tears :” he reminds them of the doctrines he

had preached amidst perils and persecutions. Evidently he is anxious that their fair beginning should continue when he should be absent; that no root of bitterness should spring up to trouble them; that no change of purpose, no lukewarmness, no neglect, should cause their candlestick to be removed out of its place. He therefore entreats, he warns them, he takes them to record that they had heard the counsel of God from his lips. He presses the duty of watchfulness over their own souls and the souls of the flock; and then, with the earnestness of a heart that beat only with tenderness, he "commends them to God and the word of his grace, which was able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among all them that were sanctified." If kept by their God, submissive and obedient to His word, then, although they might not again mingle their prayers below, they would surely be reunited in holier, happier realms, "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Under the circumstances of the present occasion, brethren, I think I cannot select language more appropriate from which to address you—certainly none more in accordance with my own feelings, than this of the Apostle. The union which has subsisted so happily between us is broken. In this sanctuary where we have enjoyed many precious seasons, we meet for the last time as pastor and people: we meet to offer the parting address. I confess my heart sinks at the thought. Suffer me to speak a few words of exhortation and counsel before we separate. Let us guide our meditations by the several parts of the verse before us.

In this season of trial, both to them and to himself, the Apostle *commends his brethren, first, to God*; to the God of all grace and consolation; that in Him they might find a sure refuge, and that He might guard them with his fatherly care. This is to be considered as the first and prominent idea of his language. He had just repeated the most momentous instruc-

tions, and adverted to the solemn duties which devolved upon them, and by the performance of which they should be saved, if they kept in mind and practised what he had delivered unto them. Yet he well knew the difficulties and dangers they would have to encounter, the many trials, temptations, and perhaps persecutions, they must endure, the many allurements to spiritual delinquency,—to overcome which would require their utmost vigilance, directed and sustained by Divine grace. And to no hand could he safely commit, to none could he commend them, but to “Him who was able to keep them from falling and to preserve them to His heavenly kingdom.” To none could he direct them in seasons of trial, for guidance and support,—of temptation, for strength to encounter and grace to triumph, but to God himself.

We may suppose that he would desire they might possess temporal comfort and temporal joys, so far as would consist with their spiritual good. But the superintending providence of God could alone protect them and bestow upon them present felicity: He alone could make their cup to overflow with benefits: His presence and His smiles would add ten-fold to their enjoyments, whilst His frown would turn to bitterness and anguish, the best portion the sons of earth could enjoy.—Yet it was of their *spiritual* interests he was specially mindful. If they flourished in the ways of righteousness, if their souls prospered and were in health, if the seeds of holiness sprung up and strengthened within them, if they were preparing for a happy immortality, it was all well. In this hope his very soul could rejoice, and his joy no man should take from him: and in any vicissitude of outward events, they would have no reason to regret their choice, or repine at their prospects. But if they should withdraw from the ordinances of God’s house, become heedless, revert again to folly, in his absence forget the instructions he had uttered, and lose their sense of spiritual things; if the blight of the world should pass over them and wither their fruits

of holiness; if they should yield themselves a prey to seductive errors, and stop short in the road of piety—what cause would there be for lamentation! how would his ardent love for them, and his interest in their final victory, be at last disappointed. In such case, they should not renew their sweet communion, on the hills of heaven: their separation (heart-rending thought!) would prove *eternal*.—Could the Apostle, could any faithful minister of Christ, for one moment admit such a thought in regard to any over whom the Holy Ghost had made him an overseer, without overpowering emotions of sadness? And what more appropriate in such circumstances, than to commend them to the God of grace, to the *Father* who had given his own Son for sinners, and had promised with him to bestow all things—to the *Redeemer*, in his perfect atonement and prevalent intercession; in his prophetic instructions and kingly authority—to the *Holy Spirit*, in his renewing and sanctifying influences—to the God of power, to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think?—To the Chief Shepherd does Paul refer them for direction and support. Let them but seek that love which God had displayed in Christ Jesus our Lord—be washed in that blood which had been shed freely for transgression—implore the help of the Spirit in all their necessities—learn to live near to the throne of grace,—and all would be safe. It was the best direction he could give them; it was all that was necessary.

But his words may also imply a *solemn transfer of the saints to the Lord*, from whom he, as an under shepherd, had received them. He recommits them to that faithful One, whose they were, and whose own honor was concerned in their preservation: to whom he and they must render their final, solemn account.—What more impressive than the transaction, in which the minister of God returns to the Great Head of the Church the souls which had been given to his trust, and the seals of his ministry?—The Apostle had already made the dear deposit of his own



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vigorous resolutions, alone, that they may expect to persevere ; but only through the strength of him who loved them and who having given himself for them, will not suffer frustration, or be disappointed of the reward of his toil and blood. It is the promise and grace of God which give practical verification to this consolatory truth. And it is by means of the continued operation of the same word of God which is employed as the instrument of renewal, accompanied by the discipline of Divine providences and the culture of the Spirit, it is by his unremitting care and control, that saints are kept through the various alternations of hope and fear, light and darkness, backslidings and recoveries ; that they are humbled by rebukes and chastisements, raised and supported by the smiles of Divine love, when almost "consumed with his anger ;" and at last, when purged of their dross, are removed hence by the faithful Lord, and ushered into the "mansions prepared for them." To every redeemed soul an entrance shall be administered ; but to some, eminent in grace, and eminently prepared by the Divine dealings for that holy fellowship, "an abundant entrance shall be administered into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Of all true believers it is asserted that they shall never fail ; all shall then have God for their helper. None shall be lost, of the Redeemer's purchase. Their seats will not be vacant, their harps will not be unstrung, their redeemed persons will not be wanting to grace the triumphs of the Gospel. "Neither life, nor death, shall separate them from the love of God." The eternal inheritance, the vision of God and the Lamb, will assuredly be theirs.

Let us not, however, while entertaining this blissful assurance, forget to observe that the inheritance of the purchased possession is reserved for those of a certain character, and will be conferred only upon "them that are sanctified." Such were all those who have already been introduced to its joys. Such were the patriarchs and prophets, and holy men of old, who walked with the Invisible One, confessing themselves

strangers and pilgrims below, and, with a lofty and determined faith, setting their steps to seek "the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Such were the Apostles and primitive disciples, the noble band of martyrs of the New Testament; and such have been all, in succeeding ages, whose dying hours have been irradiated with the light from heaven, whose departing souls exulted in anticipation of the glories to be revealed in them. They all wore the same lineaments, all displayed the same sanctified character. Nor can we aspire to a place among that throng before the throne, redeemed out of every kindred and people under heaven, unless we here become assimilated in tastes and tempers, in faith and hopes, to what they were, and especially love the companionship of saints on earth and in heaven. The climes of bliss are reserved for the pure in heart; "For into that place nothing enters that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination nor maketh a lie." They alone who are growing in grace here, are preparing for the communion on high: "they shall walk in white for they are worthy;" they shall come to join in the acclamation, "Alleluia to God and the Lamb;" and be eternally satisfied with the employments and enjoyments of the glorified state.—If such, my brethren, be our character, what elevated reflections does this subject suggest; with what rapturous delight must our eye of faith gaze upon this inheritance—ours by purchase of the Redeemer's death, ours by the sure promise of the Father's love. How sweet and composing the consolations it imparts, that amidst the vexations and disappointments of time we may look away to a world where all will be stable and serene: amidst our spiritual temptations and cares, we are carried along to the rest where no conflicts affright, where sin and sorrow never come: amidst the painful separations below, we hasten to be reunited where friendships exist unalloyed and unbroken. Paul felt these considerations in all their force at the moment he uttered the text, and from the fullness of his heart, breathes the desire

that the blessings in reserve for the saints might be enjoyed by his beloved brethren, and that the grief and dismay of unbelieving souls might never be their bitter portion. And what more appropriate can I utter, than, adopting the spirit of his parting words, to "commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified."

The period has arrived, within a few moments, my hearers, when I am to bid you adieu. Standing in so solemn and affecting an attitude, pronouncing my closing message, the last accents of truth you will ever hear from my lips as your pastor, memory is busy in recalling the scenes and associations and circumstances of my five years' labor among you. Nor can I, dare I say, that my reflections are unmingled with regrets that I have not been more intensely diligent, and with sad forebodings as it respects many of you. I look round and see many of you, yet unreconciled to the Saviour, apparently no nearer the kingdom of God than when I first came among you. I consider the weighty charge I have here received of the Lord Jesus, the deep responsibility of the care of souls, that this work is connected with eternity, and then reflect upon the limited results of my labors, compared with what yet remains to be done, the little impression I have been able to produce on many minds, and I am overpowered with my emotions. In giving back to the Chief Shepherd the flock he here entrusted to my care, most sincerely, most fervently, would I implore that my weakness, my want of wisdom, fervor, fidelity to the souls of this people, may be forgiven, and may not be the occasion of condemnation to any among you. May the good seed of the kingdom yet spring up and bear a joyful harvest.

For all the kind attention you have uniformly displayed, for personal regard, for very many tender and friendly offices to my family, I desire to return you my heartfelt acknowledgments: for these I shall respect and esteem you while recollection shall last. And I ask you still to believe that though I deem it

my duty to leave you, I do not therefore the less love you, nor do I feel indifferent to your love. It will be a source of chief gratification to hear of your good estate, and I trust we shall also be spared, often to see each others faces in the flesh.

In view of the season of your vacancy, suffer me to offer a word of counsel, which my solicitude for your prosperity suggests, although there exist no adverse indications, to render it absolutely necessary. Be careful, brethren, to maintain that *spirit of harmony and peace among yourselves*, by which you have always been characterized, and which has happily continued so perfect and undisturbed during the whole course of my ministry. Surely no pastor ever passed five years among a people in more uninterrupted concord and affection than that which has marked our union. It is a testimony you deserve at my mouth, and is as honorable to you as it has been grateful to my feelings. Let each, then, determine on his part to maintain the same spirit for the future. "Be perfect, be of one mind, live in peace and the God of peace shall be with you." And I cannot but hope that in this same temper you will consider it all-important, speedily to supply yourselves with a pastor: one who, more effectually and successfully than I have done, may break unto you the bread of life, and feed you with knowledge and understanding. This is my ardent desire in your behalf, and in its accomplishment, none will more sincerely rejoice than myself.

When you shall again enjoy the services of a stated pastor, let me suggest that you make it a matter of conscience regularly to attend on his ministrations in the sanctuary.—He whom you shall choose, will be one, I trust, of sound evangelical views, and evidently anxious mainly to do good to your souls. Any other than such you ought not, I believe you will not, invite to take the oversight of this flock of Jesus Christ. Give him, then, the encouragement of your presence in the house of God, as well as your respect and attachment in social life. For be assured that if he be a man of a proper spirit, and seek not *yours* but *you*,



he cannot be content merely to receive his stipulated salary, and sit down at ease while none "believe his report," and few come up to the solemn ordinances. In your attendance here and in the success of his ministry in winning souls to Christ will he look for his encouragement, or find discouragement and sadness.

And now, my brethren, my final message draws to its close. But first I would address a few words to the various classes before me.—*Christian brethren*, professed followers of the Lamb, to that faithful, covenant-keeping Saviour, and to the spirit of his grace, do I commend you, that you may be built up on your most holy faith, and be prepared for an inheritance with them that are sanctified. "Be diligent, be faithful unto the death, that ye may receive the crown of life."—Some of you are the seals of my ministry here, and do I in vain hope that you will be among those whom I may be permitted to present at the last day, "saying, here am I, Lord, and the children whom thou hast given me."—"Be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ;" and see to it, that your faith become not faint, your hopes end not in disappointment and shame. Often shall I bear you on my heart to the throne of grace; and it is my anxious desire, brethren, that you should *pray for me*.

My *impenitent hearers*, receive one more message, one warning call, ere I leave you.—The ministry you have enjoyed for the past five years is just ended; a few moments, and its accounts will be made up for the Judgment. But oh! what has been its effect upon you, and what answer are you prepared to give for its blessings? The many seasons of prayer, the many sermons, the many solemn ordinances, the strivings of the Holy Spirit, are they all, all without avail? and are they destined only to deepen the woes which will gather round a dying pillow, and to aggravate your final condemnation?—You have often heard from these lips the warnings and entreaties of God's love; I have often seen the bosom heave with emotion and the eye overflow with tears. But no conversion has

succeeded; and when you and I shall stand before the throne, and the account of my mission must be given to the awful Judge, Oh what shall it be? Must I become a swift witness against you? must I speak to your confusion and dismay? The Lord forbid, and grant you repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth. Let me once more pray you to ponder the things which belong to your peace. Once more I would preach to you the doctrine of the Cross: I "pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled unto God."—*Aged hearer*, neglect it not, for your sun is declining, your day of grace will soon be ended. Seize the moments which fly, for they may be among the last allotted to you.—*Ye of mature age*, amid the occupations of this life, be careful that you become not so much immersed in the cares of the world, so much engrossed by your several pursuits, as to forget that you have souls to be saved, which you have long, too long neglected.—And *youthful hearers*, beware of the allurements around you and the deceitfulness of your own hearts, and put not off the work of repentance till age come, for the frost of age may unfit you for it, or God may summon you suddenly away.—"Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."—Once more, I entreat you to remember the word which has been spoken unto you.

*Finally, brethren*, FAREWELL. The volume of my ministrations among you is now closed, until the Lamb who is worthy shall take the books and shall open the seals. Then their results will be made manifest to the assembled universe. Wherever you go, in whatever circumstances you may be placed, may the shadow of the Almighty be your protection—the loving-kindness of our God never desert you. And when life's pilgrimage is over, may we all meet where our communion will be perpetual; where separations, that rend the heart, are not known;

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"where seraphs  
Gather immortality on life's fair tree,  
Fast by the throne of God."—

AMEN.

*Letter of Mr. Vermilye to the Church, requesting a Dismission.*

TO THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD.

Dearly beloved brethren,

As far as I have been able to interpret the leading of Divine Providence, the period seems to have arrived when we are called to break that union which has subsisted between us. You are acquainted with all the circumstances of my call to Albany. Before coming to the determination to accept that invitation, I endeavored earnestly to obtain heavenly guidance, and have "feared to lean to my own understanding." I hope I act from a sincere and upright purpose, and that the Lord will overrule it for the good of all concerned.

I have notified this meeting, with the knowledge of some of the brethren, affectionately to ask of you to appoint a Committee, if it seem proper, to unite with me and the Parish, should they appoint a Committee, in calling a Council of dismission; that the separation may take place at such time as circumstances shall dictate.

In this whole matter, I can honestly say, dear brethren, that I have experienced severe and painful struggles. You who know me, will, I believe, do me the justice to think that I could not break away without a pang, without many tears. In ordinary cases it would be trying: but here I have spent happy days; here, I trust I can say, my own soul has been blessed. I hope I have better learned my duty and how to perform it. I have had the approbation of the Master, in some souls as the seals of my ministry; there has been an uncommon spirit of harmony among us; to me all has been kindness and peace. And while I have often lamented that my ministry seemed not more profitable, I have still hoped that good seed was sown, and that some were benefitted. An union so perfect, so pleasant, so peaceful, I cannot sunder without deep feeling. I go, moreover to a strange place, "not knowing the things which shall befall me there." One request, beloved brethren, I have to make, that when separated, I may still retain a place in your kind remembrance, and that you will often think of me at the throne of grace. My attachment to this church is strong. May the Lord be the guide of each; and may we, after life's pilgrimage, be all united in that place where is no remove, where are no separations.

I am, beloved brethren,  
Yours in the bonds of Christ.  
THOMAS E. VERMILYE.

April 6, 1835.

*Reply of the First Church in West Springfield to the foregoing Request of their Pastor.*

At a meeting of the First Church in West Springfield, holden April 6, 1835,

*Voted unanimously,* That Deacon Elisha Eldridge, Asa Nash, and Solomon Lathrop, Esq. be appointed a Committee to wait on the Rev. Mr. Vermilye, and to express to him our deep regret, that the connection between us, which has been uniformly continued in peace, harmony and Christian fellowship, must so speedily come to an end; and to assure him of our earnest and sincere prayers that the smiles of Heaven may attend him wherever he shall go, and that the favor of that Master whom he has so faithfully served among us, may crown his future labors with more abundant success.

*Voted,* That said Committee, with such persons as the Parish has appointed for that purpose, be authorised to concur with Mr. Vermilye in the calling of a Council for his dismission, whenever he shall choose to have it take place.



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